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ABSTRACT

This paper examines some probable reasons for the black adolescent male's contribution to increased pregnancy in the black community. Using a situation analysis, it presents the following testable suppositions: (1) black males' fear of retribution for impregnating a girl has diminished, leading to increased sexual intercourse and ultimately to more teenage pregnancies; (2) when black males are denied access to economic, educational, and status rituals available to their white counterparts, they use sex to define their manhood; (3) if increased educational, recreational, and employment opportunities were available, black teenagers would direct more energies to endeavors other than sex; (4) development of black teenagers' spiritual self would decrease rates of homicide, suicide, and early pregnancy in the black community; and (5) if the black community defined manhood and womanhood from a more Afro-centric perspective, instead of from the more liberal white perspective, less self-destructive behavior would occur. (LHW)

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ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND IT S DELAY

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A BRIEF LOOK AT SOME PROBABLE REASONS FOR THE BLACK ADOLESCENT MALE'S CONTRIBUTION TO INCREASED PREGNANCY IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The Black man has faced a unique and tension-driven psycho-historical development in the United States which needs to be examined in order to ascertain what and how the belief system of the Black male as well as the Black community in 1986 contributes to the problem of teenage pregnancy.

In order to analyze the Black male's existence in the United States we must begin by moving away from using global, universal concepts to explain the unique behavior of Black adolescents to a careful study of the writings of the recent literature produced by Black social Scientists. Equally important, we must perform what this writer calls a situational analysis to the experiences of the Black male from slavery up to the present time in order to try and ascertain what forces are impinging on Black male teenagers which encourages them to become fathers either by accident or conscious design.

The concept embedded in the term "situational" as well as the analysis itself rests on the phenomenological notion that humans are situated beings. Thus, for the author human beings find themselves inserted in a certain time (generational/historical); in a certain space or spaces over time (geography); as a certain sex (male or female); in a certain financial situation (economic class) or a given race (ethnicity); in a certain family (family grouping); at a certain individual time (age); in a certain environmental milleu (culture, community society).

In this paper, the author will use the situational variables described above in order to ascertain how Black teenage males situated in a predominantly white society face life crises unique to them that

may cause them to become fathers in their teenage years. Life crises, as defined by the author, means significant experiences that can be caused by pressure from forces outside the individual or group. These outside forces, structured by situationally defined interactional sequences, often cause what should be relatively problem-free developmental issues to become unnecessary traumatic life events. These traumatic events are resolved by the individual or group by means which may or may not be acceptable to their family, community or society at-large. It is the author's contention that Black males growing up in a predominantly white society makes coming to manhood problematic for the Black male teenager, since other means (economic, educational, financial, etc.) by which they can define themselves as men are limited by virtue of their being Black. Given this, it seems entirely appropriate to wonder whether Black male teenagers engage in sex as a major ritual in defining themselves as having reached manhood precisely because the path to becoming self-actualized is filled with blocks.

Clearly the unemployment level of Black male teenagers is so high that one cannot help but understand that very few Black males see financial success as a way of defining their manhood. Educational opportunities such as college or skill training are also limited; thus, educational success is equally limited in its value as a means by which Black males can succeed in their drive to reach manhood. Equally true is the probability that those adolescents who find themselves entrenched in the underclass and who see no way out engage in sex as a substitute for recreation, social activities, employment, furthering of education, etc. There is little question that these activities incur financial costs which the underclass cannot afford given the high unemployment rate

among Black teenagers.

In terms of a spiritual relationship to the world, it may be that more often than not, the Black teenage father has no particular notion of what a righteous, spiritual relationship to the world is all about. The author uses the term "righteous" in order to stay away from the word "religion" although church-going behavior may be important in terms of forming self-discipline around delaying one's entrance into actual sexual contact with the opposite sex.

In terms of individual age, the author agrees with Hare and Hare in their book Bringing The Black Boy To Manhood that when Black males reach their 11th year they need to go through a set of tasks designed to take place over a year that clearly defines for the pre-adolescent what constitutes manhood as defined by the Black community. The Hares call the year's experience "the passage." The tasks the pre-adolescent carries out during the year of "the passage" clearly defines what comprises Black manhood. It is the author's belief that having successfully completed "the passage" and having been described as reaching manhood in a ceremony that takes place at the end of the year, the Black adolescent is prepared to handle the intensity of frustration they will encounter as their attempts at trying to successfully complete the majority rituals which include educational and financial success are delayed or entirely blocked. It is the author's belief that the blunting of the intensity of the frustration and anger that comes as a result of blocked opportunities would lead to less Black male suicide, Black on Black homicide, Black teenage pregnancies, and too frequent admissions of Black males into psychiatric facilities. It is also the writer's belief that if Black pre-adolescents are taught how to internalize the

the belief that "Black Is Beautiful," they would do nothing to harm another Black person or themselves. The author recognizes that living out this ideal is very difficult when an individual or group is trying to survive in a society that constantly defines them as second class. However, it must be clear that internalizing their self-worth would greatly enhance the Black male's chance for positive survival.

When looking at the Black male's insertion into the generational time of seventies and eighties as well as the space in which they find themselves, the Black adolescent male growing up in predominantly White America may feel less fear around causing early pregnancy. When the author was a teenager his mother and father warned him that if he brought a "five pounder into the world" retribution from them as well as the young lady's family would be terrible and swift. The term "shotgun wedding" was upheld and as such, because of a terrible fear of suffering loss of life or limb, Black male adolescents in the author's generation would abstain from intercourse, interrupt their orgasm, or do everything up until sexual intercourse then stop, or use condoms. Equally as important was the Black male's own desire or mandate to marry a "good" girl which in that case was a "virgin"--the symbol of pure womanhood. The generation of the 70's and the 80's put little emphasis on adolescents being virgins when they are married. The generation of Black adolescent males in the seventies and eighties more often than not is not forced to get married, nor is disciplinary action taken in any way. Rather, they seem to expect to hear the sophisticated phrase of modern adults, "just cause she is pregnant it doesn't mean they have to get married." Too often in my clinical practice the mothers of teenage mothers do not want their daughters to get married to "the no-good Negro

just cause she's pregnant." Interestingly enough, contrary to what seems to be popular opinion, a Ford Foundation study done with teenage fathers indicated that they wanted to assume some responsibility in terms of raising their offspring. During the author's generation, abortions were illegal, the abortionist was hard to know, and even if the adolescent knew the abortionists they were afraid to contact him or her for fear they would be severely punished if discovered. In contrast, the generation of the seventies and eighties see abortions as a viable way of terminating unwanted pregnancy, thus, not supporting the traditional African view that one supports and extends life rather than destroy life.

Further, it is the author's belief that the Black community in assimilating, accepting and internalizing the white majority's notion of sexual freedom as well as trying to be modern parents, have raised a generation of teenagers who see engaging in sexuality on a regular basis as normal. If teenage pregnancy is to be diminished the Black community must have a re-orientation of values which if based on the Afro-centric perspective will clearly point out that reaching manhood or womanhood means more than engaging in sex. At the same time, the Black community must make white society open up to other racial groups the rituals is has kept for itself which include economic, academic, recreational and social experiences based on upward mobility and freedom of opportunity which will then give Black adolescents other means by which they can define themselves as reaching adulthood.

What I have tried to do is give the readers a framework with which to analyze the Black experience as it takes place in the United States in order to look at the phenomena of increased Black teenage pregnancy where it is seen as problematic although it is not problematic in other

areas of the world inhabited by Blacks. Using a situational analysis, it appears that some testable propositions have emerged.

(1) Black males' fear of retribution for getting a girl pregnant in this generation is far less than it was in the past; thus, they enter into sexual intercourses more quickly which increases the frequency of contact ultimately leading to more teenage pregnancies.

(2) Black male adolescents, by virtue of not being able to engage in other rituals (economic, educational, status, upward mobility, etc.) easily obtained by this society's white male counterparts, too often use sex as a definition of their manhood, and even leading one young man to say to the author, "I got her pregnant so my boys could have physical proof that I am a man."

(3) Black teenagers would, with increased educational, recreational and employment opportunities, direct more of their creative energies in endeavors outside of sex.

(4) Black teenagers with specific training carried out by institutions in the Black community to develop their spiritual self would cause the rate of homicide, suicide, and early pregnancy to drop in the Black community. The spiritual training could or could not include specific related training. It is the author's belief that "righteous," postive, value-oriented behavior such as looking out for one another can and should be taught both in and out of the church (family, school, YWCA, after school programs, etc.).

(5) If the Black community defined manhood and womanhood from a Afro-centeric perspective during "the passage" less self-destructive behavior would occur.

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